

Coordinating an escape from the Taliban

Healix assisted with emergency evacuations from Afghanistan when Taliban forces entered Kabul.

Summary

In summer 2021, as US troops withdrew from Afghanistan en masse, the Taliban began to mobilise and advance on territory it had not held for 20 years. As the fall of Kabul appeared increasingly imminent, Healix began preparations to evacuate clients when the time came.

Our preparation proved vital when Healix was contacted by a client to provide a rapid evacuation plan for their staff and dependents, from Kabul and the surrounding area.

Challenge

With Taliban forces within 50 miles of Kabul, Healix made plans to begin evacuations. However, shortly afterwards, Taliban forces entered Kabul and President Ghani fled the country, signalling the collapse of the government. The city went into de facto lockdown.

Our Approach

We stood up our Incident Management Team to begin immediate evacuation as soon as there was an opportunity. Healix also received evacuation requests from individuals whose own providers were unable to support them. We sent evacuee manifests out and established a categorisation system according to individual threat levels from the Taliban.

There was no immediate opportunity to evacuate by air except for those who were already on diplomatic flight manifests. The risks of sending people to the airport where crowds were amassing were high, while there was uncertainty

about the viability of travel for those who didn't meet Covid-19 travel requirements, and without visas.

We prioritised covertly evacuating those most at risk through contacts at the airport before checkpoints were properly established. As this was a high-risk strategy, we only undertook this for individuals who had been directly threatened by the Taliban and were vulnerable to imminent arrest or execution.

All other evacuees were supported to stand fast in a secure location, while we worked up different viable routes. We identified that our safest option would be ground extraction into the surrounding countries. We planned to evacuate across the border to Pakistan, where our trusted Pakistani providers could move evacuees to Islamabad for air extraction. This required taking a route associated with ambushes and banditry as well as multiple Taliban checkpoints. Despite this, we assessed this as the safest route available.

Outcomes

Healix had multiple evacuations running simultaneously and successfully. Over the course of one month, Healix successfully evacuated multiple individuals and families via air and land routes. Evacuation plans were tailored based on individual risk factors.

Healix maintained contact with the individuals that we evacuated to safety, who are now living safely in different locations globally.